

Labor

President Bush has backed pro-growth policies to strengthen our economy and make sure everyone who wants a job can find one. In 2006, his proposals will help more Americans access job training and get the skills needed to compete in a changing and dynamic economy. The President also seeks to strengthen worker benefit programs and to ensure vigorous enforcement of laws that protect workers' wages and promote opportunity.

Job Training:

- The President's Budget proposes to give Governors broad flexibility for job training by consolidating the four major Department of Labor (DOL) job training and employment grants into a single \$4-billion State grant program. Governors would also have the option to supplement the consolidated grant with resources from a "menu" of other Federal job training and employment programs.
- To ensure greater accountability, the President's Budget proposes legislation to establish increasingly rigorous performance standards each year, with an ultimate goal of States placing in employment 100 percent of workers trained with grant resources in the tenth year.
- Along with the President's \$250 million Community College job-training initiative, these proposals will train 400,000 workers annually – twice as many as are trained under the current system.

Improving Access to Health Benefits:

- To improve access to health benefits for workers in small businesses, the President has called for legislation to authorize Association Health Plans (AHPs), which would allow small businesses to join together through industry and professional associations to purchase affordable health benefits for their workers. In addition, the President supports expanded AHPs, which would be available to civic, faith-based, and community organizations. High health-care costs are the reason that many Americans are uninsured, and traditional and expanded AHPs would make health coverage more available and affordable for all Americans. The President also supports Health Savings Accounts (HSAs), which help people save money to pay for medical expenses.

Protecting Workers:

- The 2006 Budget provides \$1.4 billion for DOL to carry out its responsibilities under more than 180 worker-protection laws.

Ensuring a Safe and Healthy Workplace:

- The worker-protection budget includes \$747 million to allow the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) to maintain a strong enforcement presence and help employers ensure the physical well-being of their employees.
- Included in this amount is \$1 million to improve OSHA's ability to publish more timely data on worker injuries and illnesses, in order to better target its enforcement efforts and strengthen program results.

Union Members' Rights:

- To assist the Office of Labor-Management Standards (OLMS) in ensuring the financial security and integrity of labor unions, the President's worker-protection budget proposes a \$7 million (17%) increase to reinvigorate OLMS audit and compliance programs.
- Included in this amount are \$5 million to help OLMS hire 48 new auditors and investigate and combat embezzlement of union funds and \$1 million to create a new, contractor-operated unit to advise unions on how to comply with the law.

Pensions and Benefits:

- The President's Budget includes \$137 million for the Employee Benefits Security Administration (EBSA), which works to protect the integrity of pensions, health plans, and other employee benefits for more than 150 million people.
- The President's Budget proposes legislation to protect the defined-benefit pension plans of 44 million Americans insured through the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation. This comprehensive proposal would reform funding rules, adjust pension premiums, improve disclosure to workers, and restore financial stability to the defined-benefit pension system.

Veterans:

- For 2006, the Administration requests \$224 million for the Veterans' Employment and Training Service to help homeless veterans reintegrate into the workforce, maintain strong transition-assistance efforts to help returning military personnel successfully return to the civilian workforce, raise awareness in the employer community of the skills that veterans can provide, and ensure that our military members know that their jobs will be protected when they return from their service to our Nation.

Supporting Compassion:

- The Budget provides a total of \$75 million for the second year of the President's Prisoner Reentry Initiative, which teams Federal agencies with faith-based and community organizations to help recently released prisoners make a successful transition back into society and long-term employment.

Preventing and Recovering Improper Payments on Unemployment Insurance Benefits:

- A proposed package of legislative changes will reduce improper payments by imposing a penalty for Unemployment Insurance (UI) fraud, enlisting private collection agencies, charging employers whose actions lead to overpayments, and using Federal income tax refunds to recover delinquent UI debts – saving an estimated \$4.7 billion over 10 years.

"Comp Time" and "Flex Time" Legislation:

- The President has called on Congress to allow employers to offer compensatory time off and "flex-time" arrangements, to give private-sector workers the same flexible scheduling options that Federal employees now enjoy.